

U.S. Embassy Dushanbe ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

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Public Affairs Section Provides Alumni with Direct Access to Tajik Foreign Policy Advisors



USG alumni discussing Tajikistan's multilateral foreign policy with Tajik foreign policy advisors

On April 21, 2010, twenty USG alumni had a roundtable discussion about Tajikistan's multilateral foreign policy with Farhod Salim, European and American Desk Officer at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan; Suhrob Sharipov, Director of the Center for Strategic Research under the President of Tajikistan; and Parviz Mullojonov, an independent political expert. The speakers opened the discussion by giving an overview of Tajikistan's foreign policy priorities in the region and globally. They emphasized the central role of the Roghun hydropower plant project in Tajikistan's foreign policy interests, noting its importance for Tajikistan's long-term development. During the discussion, the alumni raised a variety of issues, such as how to improve Tajik-Uzbek relations, the need to combat corruption in order to attract foreign investment, reasons behind drastic changes in Tajikistan's foreign policy over the last seven years, Tajikistan's position in Central Asia and expanding ties with southern neighbors, poverty reduction strategies, and other issues that are critical in shaping Tajikistan's foreign policy.

Ambassador Gross Congratulates Tajik People on the Occasion of Navruz



Ambassador Gross congratulates Tajik citizens on the Navruz holiday

Ambassador Gross made a congratulatory speech on Navruz for Tajik citizens through eight radio and TV outlets. The event took place in the pavilion in front of the U.S. Embassy. After giving the congratulatory message, Ambassador Gross talked about the importance of this holiday, not only for Tajiks in Tajikistan, but also all the Persian-speaking people throughout the world. He mentioned that this holiday was recognized by Congress and that the United States highly values and respects the ancient culture and traditions of the Tajik people.

Alumni Want to Work Here!

On April 28, 2010, the Public Affairs Section (PAS) hosted nine alumni of the FLEX program for a Career Day event. The alumni toured the Embassy and had the chance to speak with representatives from several sections, as well as with USG programs alumni who work at the Embassy. The students started out their day with a tour of the USAID office, where they learned about development projects in Tajikistan. From there, they went to General Services Office and heard how that office keeps the Embassy running. The group then moved on to PAS, where they learned about all of the programs and services provide, including alumni grant opportunities.



USAID Deputy Program Officer Kevin Dean speaks about development projects in Tajikistan



USG alumni share their U.S. experience with the Ambassador during lunch

After touring PAS, the group met in the Information Recourse Center with representatives from Human Resources who taught them about resumes writing. The Ambassador joined the group for lunch, during which the students shared their experiences in the U.S. and asked questions about how to attain career success.

Ambassador Gross Learns about Tajik University Issues

On April 30, 2010, Ambassador Gross hosted a Choi Chat for university administrators at his home. The talk was attended by six administrators from universities around Dushanbe, including the Pedagogical University, the Technological University, the Tajik-Slavonic University, the Institute of Entrepreneurship, the Tajik National University, and the University of Languages. Cultural Affairs Officer McKenzie Milanowski, Cultural Affairs Assistant Maya Vakhobova, and



Ambassador Gross and six university administrators discussing the Tajik education system

Cultural Affairs Assistant Tahmina Niyazova were also in attendance. Many critical issues regarding the Tajik education system were discussed. It was a good opportunity for the representatives of all of the participating universities to meet with each other and to know more about the most important issues at their respective universities and to brainstorm ways to tackle them. The U.S. Embassy is supporting these universities with different activities, such as speaker programs and distribution of materials.



FLEX and UGRAD alumni share their political opinions with Political Officer Charles Martin

Public Affairs Section and Political/Economic Section Team Up to Discuss Youth Political Opinions

On April 29, 2010, the Public Affairs Section and the Political/Economic Section held three activities together to learn about the political opinions of youth in Tajikistan. Political Officer Charles Martin led all the meetings, which included talking with young journalists at a local cafe, English Access Microscholarship students at the Aga Khan Humanities Program, and FLEX and UGRAD alumni at the Public Affairs Officer's residence.

Cultural Affairs Officer Meets with Recently Returned Imams

On April 20, 2010, Cultural Affairs Officer McKenzie Milanowski and Cultural Affairs Assistant Maya Vakhobova met with three imams who recently returned from an IVLP program. They said that they loved the program and learned a lot about freedom of religion and freedom of expression. They were amazed that people can protest right in front of the White House and not be carted off by the police, and they talked about Jewish and Palestinian people they saw working together at a conference they attended. They were happy to have been welcomed into the homes of people of all different faiths and were delighted that every city they went to have a mosque and Friday prayers. One of them said he was afraid that they would be stared at or viewed as enemies, but everyone was nice to them and no one stared at their clothes or beards, nor did anyone give them a hard time when they were praying. They indicated that they would like to put together a pamphlet or a short film about what they learned.



Cultural Affairs Officer McKenzie Milanowski and Cultural Affairs Assistant Maya Vakhobova meet with three imams who recently returned from an IVLP program

English Language Fellow Sharon Saturnus Teaches Kickboxing to Tajik Girls

On April 9, 2010, Sharon Saturnus, an English Language Fellow, organized a kickboxing class for eight girls in an empty space above the American Corner in the Sughd Oblast Public Library in the northern city of Khujand. Six of the participants were from a local university, and they brought two additional girls with them. Sharon taught them basic kickboxing moves; and, because Tajik girls love to dance, Sharon showed them how the basic kickboxing moves could also be used as dance moves. Kickboxing gave the girls a good chance to practice timing, rhythm, and coordination. Sharon chose kickboxing because no partner is needed, no music is necessary, one doesn't need to be especially coordinated to do it, and it's just a lot of fun. Some of the girls came to learn self-defense, and some came to lose weight. The girls were so excited about the class that they asked Sharon to teach kickboxing two times a week instead of just once.



In Tajikistan, a conservative Muslim country, girls are generally discouraged from participating in sports. This activity got a group of Tajik girls interested in sports and exercise, and it showed them that athletic activities are not just for boys. Also, Sharon did all the instructions in English, which allowed the girls to practice their language skills.

Jazz Musician Visits Tajikistan



American saxophone musician Demetrius Spaneas performing in Khorog

The United States Embassy introduced residents in the farthest districts of Tajikistan to the amazing sound of American saxophone musician Demetrius Spaneas. Demetrius travelled throughout Tajikistan for two weeks and played jazz to hundreds of people from different parts of the country, many of whom had never heard this unique American art form. Demetrius not only played music, but he also met with local government officials to encourage the formation of more U.S.-Tajik cultural and educational programs. Jazz was something new for the people of the farthest districts of the country. After each performance, the audience asked questions about jazz music, learned about improvisation, and asked Demetrius to perform his favorite songs. In return, local Tajik musicians in Dushanbe, Khorog and Murghab played traditional music for Demetrius.

May 4-13, Demetrius gave more than ten performances in Khorog, Murgab, and Dushanbe, reaching widely varied audiences. He performed at a jazz festival in Dushanbe, at the American Corners in Dushanbe and Qurghon-Teppa, and at the Bactria Cultural Center and also talked about and played jazz music for schoolchildren in Dushanbe and Sarband.

Give Kids a Smile Day



Give Kids a Smile Day at the American Corner in Qurghon-Teppa

On February 1, 2010, the American Corner in Qurghon-Teppa held an interactive and informative event devoted to "Give Kids a Smile Day." The American Corner provided fifteen middle school children with comprehensive dental care free of charge. The American Corner coordinator gave a presentation and taught the children how to take care of their teeth. The children learned a great deal of important information about dental health and ways to protect their teeth. Some of the children gave their own suggestions on dental care. One of the children said, "It's good that we talked about our teeth today. It's very important to take care of our teeth when we are young, because if we don't do it, the outcome can be very bad and we can lose our teeth!"

Webchat on "Science and the Impacts of Climate Change" at the Khorog American Corner

On February 3, 2010, the American Corner in Khorog hosted students from Khorog State University and the University of Central Asia, as well as staff from the Tajik Natural Resources Management Unit, for a webchat discussion announced by IIP via the American Corner list-serv. Dr. John P. Holdren, a White House science and technology specialist, hosted the chat. The one-hour webchat focused on the worldwide impact of climate change. People from a variety of countries asked questions and Dr. Holdren responded to them. A student from China asked, "If we focus on climate change but not development, what would be the consequences?" Dr. Holdren responded that a balanced approach focusing on both climate change and development is essential. As this technology is new in Tajikistan, the participants were happy to participate in



Participants listen to a presenter via webchat

Grant-Writing Presentation in Khujand

On February 6, 2010, the FLEX alumni coordinator visited the alumni in Khujand and held a meeting and a grant-writing presentation in which seven active alumni of the Sugd region participated. The meeting started off with an icebreaker; in order to get to know each other, the alumni had to tell their name, what they currently do, and one thing that they miss from the U.S. Then, Shuhratjon Ahurov talked about FLEX alumni grants. The participants brainstormed on possible projects for which they could submit a grant proposal. The alumni also discussed the upcoming events. At the end of the meeting, as a sign of appreciation, a certificate was awarded to Nigora Kutbiddinova for her help with FLEX recruiting last year.

Presentation of Television Magazine "Matrix" for USG Alumni



USG alumni received DVDs with copies of Matrix program

On March 3, 2010, the Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy and NGO Internews Network organized a presentation about the USAID-funded Central Asian project "Matrix" in the Dushanbe American Corner for USG alumni. "Matrix" is a series of television programs about internet and mobile technologies for youth. About 25 alumni attended the presentation, which was followed by a discussion. The alumni gave their feedback on the program and discussed ways to better publicize this useful resource, which is now available via private TV stations in some parts of the country. Internews Network representative Farhod Rahmatov distributed DVDs with copies of the program to participants.

Discussion about American and Tajik Academic Credit Systems

More than 30 students from the Technological University of Tajikistan attended a discussion about the university credit systems in the U.S. and Tajikistan organized by FLEX alumnus Shuhratjon Ashurov and the University Mobile Training Center on March 9, 2010. Shuhratjon Ashurov started the discussion by giving general information about different systems of higher education in the world. The pros and cons of each system were explained in more detail. Then he talked about his experience in the U.S. as a FLEX exchange student studying in an American high school. The discussion lasted for more than an hour and was really effective in broadening the students' understanding of different kinds of educational systems. As a result of the discussion, the participants agreed to form a group of volunteers so that they would go to middle schools and high schools and explain the American credit system.

Charity Valentine's Day Show

On February 13, 2010, FLEX alumni and some other volunteers organized a Valentine's Day show, which more than 400 students attended. It was the first show of its kind organized by FLEX alumni. The show raised \$168. The hall was so crowded that many people had to stand to watch the show.



FLEX alumni playing "who can find his girlfriend without seeing her" game with the couples from the audience

Visit to Assisted Living Center in Vahdat



*Dances by Nasli Navras volunteers
for the elderly*



On March 11, 2010, FLEX alumni and NGO Nasli Navras volunteers visited an assisted living center in Vahdat together with Ray Nayler, American Councils Senior Program Officer. The volunteers prepared a good program to cheer the elders up and also to congratulate them with on International Women's Day. Their program lasted 90 minutes and really made the elderly residents happy. Besides that, flowers were bought for each woman. Songs were sung and poems were recited. Nasli Navras volunteers and the alumni were glad to make the residents happy.

Summer Camps and Summer Opportunities for FLEX Alumni

On March 15, 2010, Ilhom Aliev, FLEX alumnus, gave a presentation about summer camps and summer opportunities for FLEX alumni to ten active alumni gathered at American Councils. The meeting was started by Uktam Abdulloev, FLEX Program Coordinator. He talked about the alumni who will be arriving soon in May and also told the alumni how they can assist American Councils with pre-departure orientations. Ilhom Aliev, Coordinator of Camp America, explained the opportunities for FLEX alumni to be counselors at the camp. FLEX alumni Zevar Babajanova and Ardasher Khashimov talked about their experiences as camp counselors and also motivated the other alumni to apply. FLEX alumna Malika Hakimova, who was president of the NSLI-Y camp last year, also shared her experience.

Résumé-Writing Seminar

On March 16, 2010, Koveh Salehi, an exchange student from the U.S. who is studying in Tajikistan for a master's degree in Persian, conducted a résumé-writing seminar for eight FLEX alumni. Abdulvahobi Muminjoniyon, Firuza Umarov, and other attendees asked questions about how to strengthen different parts of their résumés. Mr. Salehi answered their questions using his experience in applying for different kinds of jobs and volunteer positions in the U.S.



*Koveh Salehi conducts a résumé-writing seminar for
alumni*

Community Connections Alumnus Brings California Sun to Local Apricot Industry



Bahodirjon Toshmatov, Community Connection Program alumnus, conducted a series of seminars for local farmers

Over the course of the past year, Bahodirjon Toshmatov, Community Connection Program alumnus, conducted a series of seminars for local farmers, agricultural specialists, and consumer associations in Sughd region on the solar-air method of drying apricots, based on his American experience. He held over nine seminars, eighteen training sessions, lectures, and four expositions in Isfara, Kanibadam, Asht, Bobojon Gafurov, and Spitamen districts for over 640 participants. The focus of the trainings was the modern solar fruit-drying technologies used in California. The idea was to integrate the practice into local dehkan units to improve the quality of dried fruit products and their packaging for export.

In June 2009, Bahodirjon Toshmatov participated in the Regional Apricot Fair held in Khujand, where he made a presentation about solar drying facilities. President Rahmon came up to him after the presentation and said that this practice should be spread all over the country. Bahodirjon was then invited by the Institute of Vegetable Growing at the National Academy of Science to train specialists from all over Central Asia.

Continuing his efforts to implement new practices learned in the U.S. back in Tajikistan, in 2009, the Sughd Region Association of Cooperatives that Bahodirjon is part of held their first regional exhibition, "Sughd Apricots: Producing, Processing, and Marketing," which was supported by the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED). ACTED expressed interest in being part of another exhibition that could take place as early as June 2010.

Planting Trees in Botanical Garden



On April 16, 2010, FLEX alumni Inomjon Igamov and Shuhratjon Ashurov, with the help of UNDP in Tajikistan, brought six American trees to the Dushanbe Botanical Garden to be planted. Seven alumni gathered to go to the Botanical Garden to plant the trees and plough some of the land of the garden. One of the employees of the garden helped the alumni to plant the trees.

After the event, the administration of the Botanical Garden expressed their gratitude to the American Councils

and to the FLEX alumni. The alumni were really glad that they already accomplished one of their Tajik goals in life. According to one Tajik saying, each person needs to plant a tree, build something, and raise a child.

FLEX alumni planting trees in Botanical Garden



Picnic for Alumni Teambuilding



FLEX is everywhere—even high in the mountains, close to the clouds

On April 18, 2010, ten FLEX alumni and four of their friends went hiking in the Romit Mountains, had a picnic, and did some teambuilding activities. The alumni split into two groups when they arrived in the mountains; one group cooked and the other group prepared the picnic spot. After lunch, the alumni played Frisbee and American football. At the end of the day, FLEX Alumni Coordinator Shuhratjon Ashurov discussed upcoming events with the alumni.



Fundraising in Khorog

On April 23, 2010, Khorog's most active FLEX alumni, as well as other volunteers, gathered to sell cookies and to collect money for Roshkala Hospital. The alumni wore their FLEX t-shirts so people would know who they were. They traveled around to different organizations to sell their cookies, and at each stop, they explained who they were and what the FLEX program is. Many people who bought cookies also donated extra money for the hospital. Almost all international organizations in Khorog donated money. The cookies cost the alumni only \$15, but they were able to raise \$300. Because of this event the alumni also received volunteer position offers from different organizations. An article about the fundraising effort was published in one of the leading newspapers of Tajikistan about this fundraising in Khorog. On April 30, 2010, FLEX alumni Shukriya Nazridod and Munira Mirmamadova took the \$300 and went to the bazaar and bought flour, macaroni, rice, oil, butter, sugar, dry tea, soups, and other food items, and also gathered clothes and shoes donated by people from the bazaar and books donated by the University of Central Asia. The FLEX alumni took the items to the hospital and spent the day handing out the items and chatting with the patients.



Munira Mirmamadova, city representative for Khorog, explains why FLEX alumni are collecting money

Celebrating Earth Day with Children in Qurghon-Teppa



On April 22, American Corner Qurghon-Teppa had an interactive activity with middle school kids. FLEX alumna Regina Sokolova explained to the schoolchildren what Earth Day is and why people celebrate it. The kids expressed their thoughts about protecting the environment. After the discussion, Regina gave the kids old magazines, flipcharts, and colored pencils to make collages showing how they would observe Earth Day.

FLEX alumna Regina Sokolova talks about Earth Day

Meal Service for Blind Children of Dushanbe Dedicated to Global Youth Service Day



FLEX alumnus Abdulvahobi Muminjoniyon helps a blind child find a seat at the table

On April 24, 2010, eleven FLEX alumni and twelve volunteers from NGO Nasli Navras spent the day volunteering at a boarding school for blind children in honor of Global Youth Service Day. The director of the boarding school gave opening remarks. During his speech, he congratulated everyone on Global Youth Service Day and thanked the FLEX alumni and Nasli Navras volunteers for organizing the event. The program continued with a concert, poetry, and skits. The children were then invited to sing songs. At the end of the program, FLEX Alumni Coordinator Shuhratjon Ashurov thanked the alumni, Nasli Navras volunteers, and the administration of the boarding school for their help and support. He invited all of them and the children to the cafeteria to have lunch together.

FLEX Alumni Visit the Elderly in Qurghon-Teppa



FLEX alumna Regina Sokolova assists an elderly woman

On April 24, 2010, FLEX alumni Regina Sokolova and Marat Tulegenov went to visit the family of a World War II veteran in honor of Global Youth Service Day. The veteran, Vladimir Guriev, went to the front lines in Belarus in November 1943, when he was 16 years old. Despite his young age, Vladimir was a brave fighter and wasn't scared of death, because, as he says, sacrificing his life could save 100 other lives. Today, Vladimir and his wife, Lyudmila, live alone because they don't have any relatives in Tajikistan. With the help of volunteers from American Corner Qurghon-Teppa, Regina Sokolova gathered money and bought some food for Vladimir and his wife.

An Earth Day Tree-Planting at the NEKI Center for Disabled Children in Dushanbe



FLEX alumni plant a tree

On April 25, 2010, Deputy Chief of Mission Necia Quast, Cultural Affairs Officer McKenzie Milanowski, Alumni Coordinator Shafoat Kobilova, and Gunnery Sergeant Richard Ho, Sergeant Roberto Sim, and Corporal Charles Moore from Dushanbe's Marine Corps Detachment attended an Earth Day tree-planting at the NEKI Center for Disabled Children in Dushanbe, which serves the needs of around 75 disabled children and their families. The tree-planting was organized by Muskie alumni Malika Baimatova and Salima Kasymova, and was funded by an Alumni Grant. The event began with brief introductory remarks in Tajik by McKenzie and a speech in Tajik about Earth Day by Necia. After the opening remarks, the group, which also included around twenty alumni of the UGRAD, Open World, FLEX, and Muskie programs, went to work on two large, empty garden patches. They tilled the soil and planted trees and other plants. When the planting was done, FLEX alumni gave a presentation on environmental and hygiene issues. Malika and Salima presented the center with 80 packages of cookies and presents for the children, and then the group enjoyed a lunch of plov.

UGRAD Alumna Uses Project Smile Program to Help At-Risk Girls in Tajikistan



Farangez Yuldosheva, a Global Undergraduate exchange program alumna, has brought many opportunities to Tajikistan since her return. Yuldosheva received a small grant from the Project Smile Program, funded by the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), and

used this grant to implement a project that focused on groups of at-risk girls at a children's rights center in Tajikistan. The project was designed to organize a program for the girls through which they could gain knowledge on preventive measures that could help them in the future. Project Smile is a community development program for alumni of State Department funded exchanges. Grants are awarded to alumni to implement community service activities that will benefit an underprivileged group in their local community. Since her return from the U.S., Yuldosheva has been active in many volunteer projects in orphanages and elderly homes in Tajikistan. She has joined forces with other alumni and local volunteer groups to implement different projects that help Tajikistan's development and prosperity. She currently holds the position of JFDP and Open World Program Assistant for the American Councils for International Education.

Interactive Ways of Teaching

Global Undergraduate exchange program alumna Narmina Alieva, winner of the small grant program "Project Smile," carried out a training course on interactive teaching methods. The participants were schoolteachers, university professors, and students majoring in Education. The training took place at American Corner Khujand on January 28, 2010. The teachers learned how to improve the system of education by applying innovative methods of teaching. The young teachers learned about different resources for teaching and interactive methods. Unfortunately, most of the schools of Khujand continue using traditional methods of teaching (such as memorizing grammar rules and reading lectures from Soviet-era textbooks). By introducing an interactive approach, teachers will be able to make classes more interesting.

Alumna from Tajikistan Starts Consultant Company for Quality Management

Farzona Tilavova, Community Connections alumna, used her exchange experience to start a new limited-liability company, Kamolot 1, which provides counseling and technical assistance on quality management systems. Kamolot 1 is one of the few companies in Tajikistan working on the introduction of ISO systems. It will allow businesses to introduce quality management systems that will help export food products of higher quality. Tilavova worked with the Community Connections Alumni Association director, Faridun Shodiev, for assistance in implementing the goals of her company. Shodiev and Tilavova developed a system of information distribution with volunteers from the Community Connections Alumni community who contact alumni in remote areas who do not have access to the internet. Tilavova is using the experience she gained during the Community Connections Small and Medium Enterprise Development program to assist in the development of her country. She is an internationally certified consultant and receives proposals to work abroad, but focuses most of her energy on Tajikistan. Her goals for Kamolot 1 are to eventually allow Tajik entrepreneurs to have quality products for export and to expand the job market within Tajikistan.

Global Youth Services Day



FLEX alumni and English Language Fellow Sharon Saternus go for a walk with disabled children in the northern province

The disabled kids were so happy to have company, and getting the kids out of the home and into the sunshine is a huge benefit to them. The FLEX alumni decided that they will fundraise in order to purchase more wheelchairs for the home so that more kids can go for walks.

FLEX alumni and English Language Fellow Sharon Saternus go for a walk with disabled children in the northern province

On April 26, 2010, English Language Fellow Sharon Saternus and several FLEX alumni went to visit Degmay, a home for invalids, in celebration of Global Youth Service Day. The FLEX alumni who attended were Mirzomubin Khakimov, Nigora Kutbiddinova, Gulnora Yakubova, and Manija Yusupova. It was the idea of Nigora and Mirzo to go to the invalid home, and Sharon Saternus went along to help out. A British VSO volunteer who works at the center suggested that it would be good to take the kids for walks since they are bedridden and they don't get outside unless someone takes them out. Alumni spent several hours there and took several groups of kids for walks.



Intensive English Course to Improve Spoken English

Every Thursday, American Councils presents an English-language movie to the students of different universities. Abdulvahobi Muminjoniyon and Shuhratjon Ashurov hosted the intensive English course. At the end of each movie, the hosts of the movie night always ask questions about the movie, define new words, answer participants' questions, and lead a discussion about the movie.

"New Wave" Volunteer Club Encourages Young People to Take an Active Role in Solving Social Problems in Their Local Communities



UGRAD alumna Anna Kuznetsova and the trainers of "New Wave" volunteer club

On May 23, 2010, UGRAD alumna Anna Kuznetsova held the closing ceremony of her volunteer club project, "New Wave." The New Wave project ran from March 2009 to May 2010. Through this project, Anna Kuznetsova trained 20 trainers among active university students, who in turn trained 50 high school students from five schools around Tajikistan on civil society, social responsibility, community service, and project design. These trainers established a volunteer club that is aimed at working with and engaging disadvantaged children in their communities. They came up with their own project ideas, and designed and implemented them with very little help from adults. Much of the value of these projects came from the participants' newfound understanding that they can make a difference in their community by engaging those in need. In the course of one year, the New Wave volunteers completed over 25 different projects and helped more than 1500 people.



The trainer of the "New Wave" volunteer club teaches young people how to write project proposals



High school students work on their projects

Leadership and Time Management Training



All the participants of the training received certificates

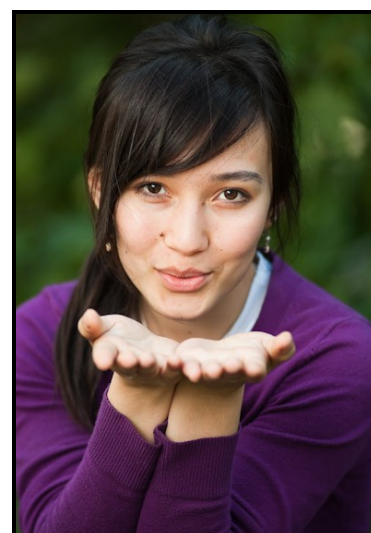
In May 2010, Shuhratjon Ashurov organized a three-day training at the Mobile Training Center at Technological University for students from different universities around Dushanbe. Together with the trainers of the mobile center, Shuhratjon trained 50 students on motivation, leadership skills, time management, the U.S. higher education system, and the value of volunteerism.



FLEX alumnus Shuhratjon Ashurov

Alumni Shoot-Out

On May 22, 2010, the Public Affairs Section held a photography workshop in Varzob for recently returned USG program alumni. The one-day event not only taught alumni basic photographic techniques, but also allowed them to network with each other and build connections. USG program alumni have access to alumni grant funding through the Public Affairs Section. Alumni prove to be the most active supporters of USG initiatives, volunteer in their communities and go on to become leaders in various fields.



FLEX alumna Firuza Umarova

Shuhratjon Ashurov Honored as FLEX Alumni Coordinator of the Month

The month of March brought deserved success to Tajikistan's FLEX Alumni Coordinator (AC) Shuhratjon Ashurov. Aside from being named AC of the month, Shuhratjon became a finalist of the Global Undergraduate exchange program and won a grant from the U.S. Embassy in Tajikistan to conduct a conference.

The AC of the Month award goes to the coordinator who has exhibited outstanding professionalism in one or more of the following categories: Conducting alumni activities, compiling FLEX alumni success stories, working with media, and finding cost-sharing opportunities. Shuhratjon Ashurov combined all of the skills that he has developed as AC to create a stellar month of alumni activities in Tajikistan. Shuhratjon organized a series of professional development events for over 100 alumni to steer them to professional success, which included four professional development trainings, a job tour at the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), TOFEL test practices, and presentations about job opportunities and openings for alumni. Additionally, Shuhratjon worked together with FLEX City Representative for Khujand, Nigora Kutbiddinova, to hold corresponding professional development month events. Alumni and local students in Khujand participated in a time management master class and a presentation by Educational Advising Center Director Naimjon Avezov on the U.S. system of higher education and scholarship opportunities for Tajik students.



Alumni also found time in March to remember those in need of a little TLC in their community. In celebration of Navruz, alumni visited the children at Dushanbe Orphanage #1. Together with volunteers from the Nasli Navras organization, alumni put on a concert and held a party for the children. The AC was able to secure a donation of \$45 from the family of an anonymous FLEX alumnus to hold the event. March also brought a visit from alumni to the Vahdat Nursing Home. Alumni put on a show with a hopeful message for the seniors, and wished the female residents a very happy International Women's Day.

Parallel to his AC responsibilities, Shuhratjon opened the Mobile Training Center for the students of the Technological University of Tajikistan in January 2010. The center conducts seminars on leadership, motivation, time management, and grant writing for students of the university, in addition to weekly current events discussions. The AC's outstanding organizational skills are being used not only to enhance the FLEX alumni program, but to develop programs for his classmates as well.

In April, Shuhratjon had another busy month. Having developed the City Representative community in Tajikistan from scratch, the AC will bring his three representatives to the capital for their official training conference. Additionally, in celebration of Earth Day and Global Youth Service Day, Shuhratjon planned a number of alumni events, including a tree planting, a park clean-up, and a soup kitchen event for senior citizens in Dushanbe.

Muskie Fellow Connects American Students to Classrooms around the World

Muskie fellow Ibragimdzhon (Ibrahim) Rustamov brings students at a local elementary school in Connecticut to different classrooms around the world. In addition to studying Educational Technology at the University of Hartford, Ibrahim volunteers with 5th grade children at Aiken Elementary School. Using the internet to connect them with their peers all over the world, Ibrahim aims to teach students both communication skills and important lessons about diversity and tolerance. More than simply talking about different cultures, Ibrahim wished to actually show his students different countries in a new way.



Ibrahim Rustamov and his students. Photograph taken by University of Hartford's Observer Magazine.

Before joining the Muskie program, Ibrahim worked for five years as a teacher in his home country, Tajikistan, where he integrated technology into his lessons even in this remote setting. "In 2002, internet arrived to my hometown (of) Isfara, and I started using the internet and computers that I enjoyed in my student years... this time in a professional level... teaching English as a second language," said Ibrahim. Ibrahim began to create lessons based on his own teaching experience and to learn new ways to present information by working as the Internet Learning Center Educator at Relief International Schools Online.

As an applicant to the Muskie program, Ibrahim wanted to continue to look for ways that he could incorporate technology into the classroom and create online learning communities through educational networks. Shortly after arriving in Connecticut on the Muskie program, Ibrahim realized his vision, creating this online community with local children.

When Ibrahim met with teachers and administrators at Aiken Elementary school, he expressed his desire to work with the students and was welcomed as a volunteer. In order to connect his students with students in Tajikistan, Ibrahim used **rafi.ki**. This British site, which takes its name from the Swahili word for friend (Rafiki), was started for students of all languages and countries to create home pages about their local schools and communities, while giving them the opportunity to research and meet students from different countries also connected to the site. Unfortunately, due to unreliable electricity in Tajikistan, Ibrahim has been unable to connect his students in the US with children from his country. However, he has started partnerships with students from the UK and China. His students have the ability to meet and learn about new these cultures by sending messages to students, starting discussion forums, communicating in chat rooms or setting up video conferences, all with the aid of the site's translation tool when needed.

Currently, Ibrahim's students are creating their own mini encyclopedia pages on the site to provide general information to other elementary level students. Topics they are working on include: American states, electronics, climate change and world hunger. To assure accuracy of information, pages are closely monitored by both teachers at Aiken Elementary and the administrators of the rafi.ki site. Ibrahim's students have been prospering since he began working with them as evident by the fact that Aiken Elementary was recently selected as the school of the month by the website and one of Ibrahim's students had her encyclopedia page on World Hunger chosen as the homepage of the month Ibrahim has seen the importance in creating an international perspective for his students that he hopes will continue after he has left Connecticut and returned to Tajikistan.

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